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Wilson-Raybould 'extremely disappointed' by Trudeau's brownface photo

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Body

VANCOUVER - Jody Wilson-Raybould, who was kicked out of the Liberal caucus amid the SNC-Lavalin scandal, said she was "extremely disappointed" to learn party leader Justin Trudeau wore brownface makeup to a party 18 years ago.

Wilson-Raybould told reporters Wednesday after a rally in Vancouver that when she first saw reports of the brownface photo, she didn't think it was real.

"I'm incredibly proud to be an Indigenous person in this country, one that has experienced racism and discrimination," she said. "And it's completely unacceptable for anybody in a position of authority and power to do something like that."

Earlier in the day, Trudeau apologized and asked Canadians to forgive him after the photo was published by Time magazine. It shows him dressed elaborately as Aladdin, with his face and hands blackened by makeup, at a "Arabian Nights"-themed party at a Vancouver private school where he used to teach.

Wilson-Raybould, who is running as an Independent in one of the most-watched ridings of Vancouver - Granville, was joined by former cabinet ally Jane Philpott and Green Leader Elizabeth May in touting a message of non-partisan leadership.

"All us being here tonight demonstrates we all want a different way of doing politics where people actually work together to face complicated challenges, the complicated challenges we face," Wilson-Raybould said.

She said addressing issues that affect all Canadians, such as climate change, require working together, even though the solutions are difficult.

"It requires all of us to colour outside the party lines," she said.

May told the rally that she is alarmed by trends of transnational corporations holding sway over Ottawa.

"If this isn't doing politics differently, I don't know what is," May said about Wilson-Raybould's non-partisan message.

May told reporters after the rally that Louise Boutin, a real estate agent who is running for the Greens in the riding, was aware of her plan to support Wilson-Raybould.

Wilson-Raybould is hoping to hold the seat against Liberal party challenger, Taleeb Noormohamed, a 42-year-old tech entrepreneur.

Also running in the riding is ***climate activist*** Yvonne Hanson for the NDP, former Ottawa political staffer Zach Segal for the Conservatives, and Naomi Chocyk, a one-time constituency staffer for Wilson-Raybould, for the People's Party of Canada.

Wilson-Raybould, a former B.C. regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations, quickly became one of the stars Trudeau and his team promoted heavily in their 2015 bid for power.

In her role as attorney general and justice minister she oversaw the legalization of marijuana and introduction of assisted dying legislation.

But Wilson-Raybould precipitated a crisis for Trudeau's government last winter with allegations she had been inappropriately pressured by the prime minister, his office, other ministers and bureaucrats to end the criminal prosecution of Montreal engineering giant SNC-Lavalin.

Wilson-Raybould quit Trudeau's cabinet over the affair, followed by Philpott. Trudeau eventually kicked both women out of the Liberal caucus.

Wilson-Raybould said Wednesday that she learned in her first term in government how easy it is to be labelled in racialized and gendered terms. She added that when a woman pushes back or stands up for her principles, she is often called difficult.

"If doing those things is difficult, I am proud to be difficult every single day of my life," she said.

Philpott told the crowd that independent voices can make a difference in the House of Commons.

"Do not ever doubt what one person can do," said Philpott, who is also running as an Independent. "We will not be silent and we will not stand down."

Wilson-Raybould is scheduled to appear at a campaign event in support of Philpott on Saturday in her Markham - Stouffville riding.

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